

Construction of the Hotel Atrio in the Plaza de San Mateo of the Old City of Cáceres,

Already in September 2004 ICOMOS Spain submitted a report for the *Heritage at Risk 2004/2005* publication in which it described in detail the impact of a major road project, the Ronda Este Interior, along the Ribera del Marco in the town of Cáceres, inscribed since 1986 in the World Heritage List. Now this World Heritage site once again gives reason for concern as there are plans for a hotel project which would affect the visual integrity of the old town. The planning development is as follows:

- In January 2004 the owners of the restaurant Atrio in Cáceres acquired a building, located between Plaza de San Mateo (in the heart of the World Heritage site) and Calle Olmos, for the purpose of its transformation into a five-star deluxe hotel, affiliated with the Relais & Chateaux chain. For this purpose an agreement with the Extremadura Regional Council, owner of the adjoining building, was found, which included the ceding of the said building in order to allow more space for the hotel, in addition to financing 49% of the total investment for the project (9.5 million euros).
- The preliminary design project for the Hotel Atrio was commissioned to the studio of the Madrid architects Luis Moreno Mansilla and Emilio Tuñón, who submitted their proposal to the Cáceres Special Plan Monitoring Committee in February 2005. The project contravened a number of regulations, laid down in the so-called Special Plan for the Protection and Restoration of the Architectural Heritage of the City of Cáceres (1990). Some of the critical aspects are:
 - Demolition of buildings rather than their compulsory restoration;
 - Merging of two lots into one;
 - Modification of existing spatial layout by new alignments;
 - Increase in building heights (16 meters);
 - Increase in building volume and maximum construction area;
 - Demolition of vaults protected and inventoried as unique elements;
 - Construction of a flat roof in granite slabs with an open-air swimming pool;
 - Violation of building typology through a design radically discordant with the existing town-planning and the Renaissance architecture of the surrounding buildings;
 - Failure to respect protected areas and their setting.

All these aspects will not only lead to the destruction of historic structures, but will also cause damage to the traditional character of the town of Cáceres. Due to the above-mentioned short-comings the Cáceres Delegation of the Official Order of Architects of Extremadura denied approval of the plans and returned them to the Municipal Council of Cáceres.

The Municipal Council intended nonetheless to convene a new meeting of the Special Plan Monitoring Committee where it plans to submit the project for approval under the subterfuge of an "exceptional intervention". But such an "exceptional intervention" contravenes all regulations contained in national, regional and local heritage legislation.

By promoting an inadequate architectural project in the very heart of a World Heritage city the Municipal Council of Cáceres is once again disregarding the instructions of the World Heritage Convention. ICOMOS will be reporting on this hotel project in its next Heritage at Risk publication.

Prof. Dr. Antonio-J. Campesino Fernández
Vice President of ICOMOS-Spain,
Head Professor of Town Planning at the University of Extremadura,
and a citizen of Cáceres,